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SUBJECT: UNDERSECRETARY BURNS' LUNCH WITH DFM RYABKOV:
US-RUSSIA RELATIONS, POST-START, MISSILE DEFENSE, IRAN,
NATO, AFGHANISTAN, INDIA, NORTH KOREA, BALKANS

REF: A. MOSCOW 3243
B. MOSCOW 3153

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary. DFM Ryabkov November 12 reiterated FM Lavrov's message to U/S Burns and the Ambassador that Russia saw the Sochi Strategic Declaration as the basis for future U.S.-Russian relations, and Medvedev's state of the union address had not been intended as a deliberate slap at President-elect Obama, but so Washington understood how negatively Moscow viewed U.S. missile defense plans. The bulk of the speech had been addressed at domestic reforms. Ryabkov repeated that Moscow wanted to meet to discuss missile defense and post-START before the end of the year, but would need until the middle of December to prepare. Negotiation of a post-START Agreement would be the "core task" between the two countries for 2009, and he urged the U.S. to focus on substance in seeking to narrow the differences. In response to U/S Burns' preview of the November 13 P5-plus-1 discussions on Iran, Ryabkov said Russia was concerned about the direction of the pressure track and the elements for a possible UN sanctions resolution circulated in September by the UK which focused on measures targeting Iran's economy and financial sector. He reiterated that Russia could not agree to measures that would punish the Iranian people. Such measures would just harden Iran's defiance, and reduce the chances that Iran would respond positively to the P5-plus-1 offer. In response to Ryabkov's question how Iran could establish confidence that it was pursuing a peaceful nuclear program, Burns responded that answering IAEA DG ElBaradei's questions would be a way to start. Ryabkov reiterated Russia's strong opposition to NATO granting a Membership Action Plan to Georgia and Ukraine, and expressed the hope that a "normal process" would resume soon in the NATO-Russia Council. The groups also discussed Afghanistan, Medvedev's trip to Latin America December 6-7, India and civil nuclear cooperation, North Korea, and the Balkans. End summary.

U.S.-Russia Relations, Medvedev's Speech

12. (C) At lunch November 12 in Moscow with Under Secretary for Political Affairs Bill Burns and the Ambassador, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov reiterated points made by FM Lavrov earlier (septel) that Russia saw the Sochi Strategic Declaration as the basis for moving the U.S.-Russia relationship forward, and that President Medvedev's state of the union address (ref A) should not be seen as a deliberate affront to President-elect Obama, but as presenting a clear picture of Russia's concerns. While Moscow considered events in the U.S., the timing of the speech had been driven by the domestic schedule. Ryabkov stressed that, as subsequently stated by Medvedev and FM Lavrov, Russia would only put Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad if the U.S. deployed its

missile defense system (MD) in Eastern Europe.

¶ 13. (C) Medvedev's state of the union speech had focused on the following four major themes, Ryabkov said, noting that international issues had been a small part of it:
-- 1) the common responsibility of the entire international community to resolve issues such as the global financial crisis and aftermath of the conflict in Georgia. The need to strengthen the international system, and promote the rule of law;
-- 2) an "unexpectedly" strong criticism of Russia's political system, saying it was unbalanced, and lacked the basic elements for democracy to perform;
-- 3) a "huge part" devoted to the judicial system and the inability of the judiciary to act effectively. The lack of proper implementation of verdicts, for instance, was a major problem for Russia in the Council of Europe where many cases were lost because of the inability to pay fair compensation for the misdeeds of government authorities; and
-- 4) a small part on international issues, mostly focused on the financial crisis and failure of the global economic system.

¶ 14. (C) U/S Burns noted that Medvedev's speech had been viewed quite negatively, especially given the timing of it and its gratuitously sharp tone. He urged the GOR to look for constructive ways to get its message across; to remind people of the benefits and importance of the U.S. and Russia working together on key issues and through existing mechanisms such as the Six-Party talks on North Korea or the P5-plus-1 on Iran. Ambassador Beyrle added that Medvedev had a good opportunity to do so through his press conference and meeting with the Council on Foreign Relations on the margins of the G20 meeting in Washington the following weekend.

Post-START and Missile Defense

¶ 15. (C) Ryabkov reiterated that Moscow wanted to hold MD and post-START discussions with U/S Rood and his delegation "in the usual format" before the end of the year, but the Russian interagency needed more time to prepare for the meeting. The first week of December was too soon, but perhaps sometime between December 10-15 would work. The GOR may provide additional comments and views prior to the meeting.

¶ 16. (C) Negotiation of a post-START agreement would be the U.S. and Russia's "core task" in 2009, Ryabkov said. While Moscow agreed that a decision on whether to extend the START Treaty did not have to be taken at the pre-December 5, 2008, meeting, the pressure on both countries from the rest of the world to reach an agreement would grow, especially as we neared the 2010 review conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Noting that the differences between us were "huge, and well-known," Ryabkov suggested that we seek to reach agreement on the areas where the possibility of reaching agreement was greater, whittling down the number of differences, until we had "3-4 key issues" to resolve. It was important, however, to focus on substance, not on scope and parameters.

¶ 17. (C) U/S Burns agreed it was important to continue as soon as possible the discussions and the efforts to narrow our differences. He added that we should also look at post-START in the context of a wider review of non-proliferation goals.

Iran

¶ 18. (S) U/S Burns previewed some of the discussion that would be held the following day at the P5-plus-1 political directors' meeting in Paris, emphasizing the need for a two-track strategy given that Iran had shown no indication that it was serious about accepting the P5-plus-1 offer or "freeze for freeze" proposal. Burns observed that Iran was simply stalling while making rapid technical progress. Thus, while it was important to continue the diplomatic track, it was also important to consider measures that would

demonstrate to Iran that the price would rise, if it did not accept the diplomatic efforts. In response to Ryabkov's question how Iran could establish confidence that it was pursuing a peaceful nuclear program, Burns responded that answering ElBaradei's questions would be a way to start.

¶9. (S) Saying that the issue was "deadlocked to a degree I've never seen before," Ryabkov emphasized the need for another meeting between Cooper and Bagheri or between Solana and Jalili. He said he had pressed Iranian officials strongly to accept the P5-plus-1 offer during his recent visit to Tehran (ref B), but they were non-committal. Perhaps the absence of such pressure would help. Although Russia had agreed to three UN Security Council Resolutions imposing sanctions and acknowledged that it bothered Iran when the UNSC acted, Moscow could not agree to measures that would punish the Iranian people. Such measures would simply push the Iranians away and eliminate their incentive to engage in dialogue, Ryabkov claimed. "I see only minuses" in adopting another sanctions resolution that targets Iran's economy and financial sector, he said, and it went "far beyond what Ministers had agreed to do." He added that independent actions by the U.S. and Europe, such as unilateral sanctions (including the sanctions on Russian firm Rosoboronexport) were unhelpful. Efforts to reinforce the "hard approach" would be "disastrous," Ryabkov insisted. If the Iranians thought they were being pushed into a corner, they would never give up but would seek ways to cause more trouble.

NATO

¶10. (C) Ryabkov reiterated Russia's strong opposition to NATO granting a Membership Action Plan to Georgia and Ukraine, and expressed the hope that a "normal process" would resume soon in the NATO-Russia Council. U/S Burns said he understood the depth of Russia's views on NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. He stressed that a hard public posture by Russia could be counterproductive. Ryabkov noted that if Russia was "too quiet," it got criticized from inside; if it was "too loud," it was called counterproductive. Russia did not pay lip service to anyone; it just wanted to be heard.

Afghanistan

¶11. (C) Ryabkov said Moscow welcomed thoughts from the U.S. on how to deal with the situation in Afghanistan and engaging with the Taliban. There were concerns that the Taliban could return to power, while some of the local leaders were overambitious. Moscow had simply noted that all should "exercise vigilance and restraint" in contacts with people on the UNSC 1267 Taliban sanctions list. Burns said that while it was a good idea in principle to consider engaging "reconcilable" Taliban leaders, however, it was harder to find any.

Other Issues

¶12. (C) Ryabkov said that Medvedev would follow the APEC Summit and bilateral meetings in Lima with visits to Brazil and Venezuela. In Rio de Janeiro, Medvedev would look at centers of innovation, meet with businesses and sign some agreements. Biofuels was an important issue. Russia thought too much emphasis had been placed on biofuels at the expense of food supply security and the environment. In the G8, Russia was considering convening a meeting in Moscow in 2009 to address these issues.

¶13. (C) Confirming that Medvedev would travel to India December 5-6, Ryabkov said Russia was very interested in cooperation with India on civil nuclear issues, and expected Russian companies to be quick to engage.

¶14. (C) U/S Burns said China was considering when to hold another Six Party heads of delegation meeting. Rumors about Kim Jong-Il's poor health also complicated the effort.

Ryabkov agreed, noting that it had been possible to agree on a detailed framework for resolution on North Korea, even though the North Koreans were "no easier than the Iranians."

¶15. (C) U/S Burns expressed concerns about increasing tensions in Serbia, especially between Dodik and Siladzhik. Ryabkov agreed. He asked what was happening with the transfer of peacekeeping in Kosovo from the UN to EULEX. If the Kosovars agreed, he said it seemed there was a good chance to have a chairman's statement closing out all open issues.

¶16. (SBU) U/S Burns has cleared this cable.
BEYRLE

NNNN

End Cable Text